

Review: Lab Theater's 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch' burns with punk-glam fury in Fort Myers

Charles Runnells, Fort Myers News-Press Published 10:00 a.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019 | Updated 11:35 a.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019



PJ McCready stars as Hedwig in Lab Theater's rock musical "Hedwig and the Angry Inch." (Photo: Paula Sisk)

"Ladies and gentlemen, whether you like it or not: *Hedwig!*"

With that, transgender rock singer Hedwig struts onstage in sparkling-gold platform boots, fishnets and a blue horror of garish makeup. And [Lab Theater](http://www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com) (<http://www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com>) explodes with the hard-rocking musical "Hedwig and the Angry Inch."

And here's my answer to that dubious intro: I do like it. A lot.

I'm not alone, either. Due to huge demand, Lab Theater just extended the show's run by another week. It now continues through Feb. 9.

There's a lot to love here, too: PJ McCready's full-throttle performance as the snarling, snarky Hedwig — all raw-red nerves, venom and howling rock fury, but with an ocean of deep pain churning beneath it all; Misha Ritter Polomsky as Hedwig's whipping boy of a husband, Yitzhak (and oh, what a great singing voice — that is, when Hedwig allows her to sing); a fierce rock band led by Julian Sundby; Hedwig's fabulous costumes and over-the-top wigs and makeup; and a scorching collection of punk-glam songs like "Tear Me Down" and "Random Number Generator" (with pauses for a poignant ballads like "The Long Grift" and the super-catchy "Wig In a Box").

Subscribe
(http://offers.news-press.com/specialoffer?gps-source=BENBian&utm_medium=exchange&utm_campaign=

Get Unlimited Access To Local News \$9.99 Per Month



Misha Ritter Polomsky (top) and PJ McCready star in Lab Theater's 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch.' (Photo: Paula Sisk)

More: [Actor Paul Reiser returns to his first love, stand-up comedy, at Mann Hall \(/story/entertainment/2019/01/29/paul-reiser-performs-friday-fort-myers-barbara-b-performing-arts-hall/2704232002/\)](#)

More: [Your guide to the 2019 theater season in Southwest Florida \(/story/entertainment/2018/12/31/what-plays-and-musicals-coming-fort-myers-naples-cape-coral-2019/2420793002/\)](#)

This isn't just a musical. "Hedwig" is part rock concert, part stand-up comedy and part bittersweet confessional.

McCready plays Hedwig, "the internationally ignored song stylist" who gains sudden notoriety after getting caught in a compromising position with rock star Tommy Gnosis (who, by the way, owes most of his success to the songs he co-wrote with Hedwig).

Support local journalism today

The show follows Hedwig's cathartic night performing at the Hotel Riverview, while former lover Tommy plays a sold-out arena nearby. In between playing rock songs and abusing her band mates, Hedwig tells the sad story of her life: A cold German mother, ruined love affairs, child sex abuse and — most painful of all — the botched sex change operation that gave her band its name: The Angry Inch.

Only \$9.99 per month

<https://subscribe.newspress.com/fops>

source=CPCAMBARD&utm_campaign=2018WINTERVISITOR&utm_content=freearticlesleft&utm_medium=ONLINE&utm_source=CPCAM

press.com%2Fstory%2Fentertainment%2F2019%2F01%2F30%2Freview-lab-theaters-hedwig-and-angry-inch-funs

McCready prowls the stage as the funny, prickly and sometimes brutally mean Hedwig. She flirts with the audience, does a funny little dance whenever the drum-glass-ferry-forts hot, and then knocks you out with a primal rock howl. But later, all that punk-rock armor falls away and you see the real Hedwig, sad and hurting and exposed: The child who lost her innocence long ago when she was just a "little slip of a girly boy."

It's a vibrant, unbridled performance full of joy and humor, pain and fury — especially on the tortured "Angry Inch," with McCready's face contorting in emotional agony as she sings the story of her unfortunate transformation.



Lab Theater: [: 10 years and counting in Fort Myers. Troupe marks anniversary, plans future. \(/story/entertainment/2018/10/15/lab-theater-10-years-and-counting-downtown-fort-myers/1523196002/\)](#)

Then there's poor Yitzhak, Hedwig's husband, backup singer and frequent human target. The role is traditionally played by a woman and stands as a kind of mirror image to Hedwig: A woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman.

Yitzhak dreams of being a drag queen, but the domineering, vicious Hedwig always overrules him (and literally pulls the plug whenever Yitzhak's back-up vocals start to outshine her own). Polomsky does a great job of showing the wounded pain and anger of someone attacked by the person he loves. He hides behind a wall of numbed stoicism and self-protection, but even he can only take so much abuse.

PJ McCready plays transgender rock singer Hedwig in Lab Theater's "Hedwig and the Angry Inch." (Photo: Paula Sisk)

Together with that solid cast, director Paul Graffy balances gritty rock performances, off-the-cuff confessions, acid-dripping sarcasm and lots of funny, innuendo-packed one-liners (most of which can't be repeated here). And then he makes you cry with some of the show's more tender moments — that wig at the end!

Graffy, by the way, directed the *last* production I saw of this great 1990s rock musical. That happened in 2008 with The Naples Players, and I loved that show, too. He hasn't lost his touch.

A few minor complaints about Lab Theater's production, though. I saw this show on opening weekend, and the frequent feedback from the sound system was a minor annoyance. Sure, feedback *is* kind of punk rock, but it's also distracting and irritating.

And in other sound problems: The band was so loud sometimes — or perhaps Hedwig's vocals were too low — the song lyrics occasionally got drowned out by the rock 'n' roll roar. I'm told, however, that Lab Theater has ironed out those sound issues since then.

Even with those problems, I still loved the show. I loved the songs (especially the pulverizing "Random Number Generator" and Yitzhak's attempt to reach the distant Hedwig — a fellow survivor — on the tender "The Long Grift"). I loved the attitude. I loved the raunchy humor. I loved the sweet, emotional core buried deep under Hedwig's huge blonde wig and punk-rock veneer. I love the little nods to Southwest Florida (Hedwig's attorneys, for example, are called "Morgan & Morgan, Masters and Johnson"). And I love the show's empowering themes of identity, self-acceptance and the walls we build to protect ourselves.

If you love edgy rock musicals — especially ones full of snark, heart and the occasional penis joke — you owe it to yourself to see this criminally under-produced show. And now that it's been extended, you have another whole week to do it.

Connect with this reporter: *Charles Runnells* (Facebook), *@charlesrunnells* (Twitter), *@crunnells1* (Instagram)

If you go

What: "Hedwig and the Angry Inch"

When: Now through Feb. 9

Where: The Laboratory Theater of Florida, 1634 Woodford Ave., downtown Fort Myers

Tickets: \$30-\$35

Info: 218-0481 or [laboratorytheaterflorida.com](http://www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com) (<http://www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com/>)

Read or Share this story: <https://www.news-press.com/story/entertainment/2019/01/30/review-lab-theaters-hedwig-and-angry-inch-burns-punk-glam-fury-fort-myers/2704256002/>

